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ABSTRACT

A program is described in which student work and achievement were displayed during Public Schools Week in a Solano County (California) shopping mall. The purpose of the program is to provide publicity for schools and to reach the 75% of the adult population who have no personal contact with schools. The program description includes: types of student work that were displayed; background on how the program developed; a program planning time line including steps involved in the planning; and reactions of the press and community leaders. This document was selected by the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) Task Force on Public Confidence as descriptive of a promising practice or exemplary project worthy of highlighting for the California educational community. (DC)

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TAKE THE SCHOOLS TO THE PEOPLE

by

Mary Ann Littlejohn

Caroll O. Price

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TAKE THE SCHOOLS TO THE PEOPLE

Solano County's unprecedented response to a first class mall coupled with motivated students and teachers who expressed their pleasure at being invited to participate in Public Schools Week led to a spontaneous creativity that very rapidly spread from school to school, district to district. Literally every inch of Solano Mall in Fairfield, California became an extension of the area's public education classroom from April 10-17. Since 75% of the adult population has no personal contact with the schools, taking the schools to the people becomes even more necessary. Vandalism was nonexistent. One parent admonished her four-year-old, "Don't touch that! Some child spent hours making that butterfly."

Teacher morale ran high during and after Public Schools Week as everyone reaped the benefits of community acclaim at school meetings, family gatherings, and local events.

Many very positive comments were heard during and after the event. Fairfield Assistant City Manager, Don Brown, felt reassured. "I liked it!" he stated emphatically. "I have two daughters in school, ages eleven and eight, so much of what I saw was familiar. People like to see student work. It made Fairfield feel like a hometown." The public seemed relieved that in spite of negative reports of falling test scores and unbalanced budgets, schools were, according to the press, "alive and well." Children were still learning and teachers still cared enough to contribute time after school to construct displays of student work for this occasion.

There was much to do and see. As the Green Valley Middle School Band played "America," passing teenagers leaned over the rails and proudly watched brothers and sisters perform while the seventh and eighth graders frowned in concentration and pretended not to notice. Further down the

mall an ROTC cadet donned a space suit and prepared for his hourly walk on the moon. One young father traced the circulating tubes of the cooling and air conditioning display step-by-step for his approving son. Close by a bright-eyed, ten-year-old girl brought her mother to the microcomputer demonstration. This time the parent listened while the child explained.

Photos of the high school girls' tennis team in action backed a display board of boys' gymnastics. A handmade chessboard attracted one family's attention while a painted cardboard mission with clothespin priests captured another. Dimensional green-crayoned turtles, E.T., the decorated egg, third-grade spelling lessons, pet stories, wooden puzzles, and delicate watercolored self portraits lined the walkways.

The excitement began when Gerviece Brown, Elementary Principal in Vacaville Unified, heard the idea for Public Schools Week from the Sonoma Charter during an ACSA Region 4 Board meeting. She carried it to the Solano Charter where Mary Ann Littlejohn (Fairfield-Suisun Unified), Dan Knapp (Solano County Office of Education) Byron Lockhart (Travis Unified) and George Tognetti (Dixon Unified) pledged support to Gerri's idea. At that point, the challenge became a working plan. Activities for the event consisted of planning with the mall marketing director and school district representatives, coordinating with teachers and administrators, and setting up, maintaining and dismantling the displays, all of which followed a very simple timeline.

... August: meeting of the Solano Charter Board of Directors to identify school district representatives.

... December: meeting of mall and school district representatives to establish timeline for observation of Public Schools Week and guidelines from Solano Mall

to include display areas, types of displays, dates and times for setting up as well as dismantling, and equipment available from the mall.

... January: reminder from district representatives to school principals and a request for information regarding types of displays. Accommodations needed for displays and measurements of space needed. Memo to music teachers outlining the types of performances which would be appropriate, dates and times available, and a request for input concerning choice of date, time, description and length of performance.

... February: individual meetings of participating teachers with district representative at the mall to select display locations from a master floor plan.

... March: collection of information and preparation of publicity releases.

... April: memo and map sent to each participating school by the district representative to finalize plans, two weeks prior to the event. Teachers, administrators, support staff and spouses converge on the Solano Mall laden with display devices, tables, stands, and thousands of student-made items. On April 11 the people came!!! April 11-17 the people continued to come...parents, grandparents, friends and neighbors with students in the lead. Teachers brought their classes to tour the displays. Volunteers monitored the displays to see that falling items were replaced, retaped or restapled. April 17 brought dismantling of displays by school staffs, so that the mall was cleared of <u>all</u> school equipment and materials within two hours after mall closing time Sunday evening.

Tony Brunelli, Daily Republic news reporter, stated "As a reporter, I thought it (Public Schools Week) was very well done...so much to see and do. I reviewed two or three things every day and still did not cover the whole thing. It was colorful...a joy! Schools put a lot into it."

Tom Hannigan, State Assemblyman who lives in Fairfield, reflected "What goes on in the classrooms of our public schools should be a personal concern for every citizen. One of the most important ways of maintaining good dialogue between the schools and the public is the annual focus on Public Schools Week. It provides an opportunity to remind ourselves of the importance of public education to our society and our economy. I was pleased to observe the very successful displays of classroom work completed by students from throughout Solano County in commemoration of Public Schools Week last April."

Solano Mall Marketing Director, Nancy Stoltenberg commented, "As you well know, the community was extremely receptive to the ideas presented. Our merchants, likewise, have expressed their satisfaction with the overall promotion. Traffic figures for the week of the event substantiate the success story. I think we can all be extremely proud of the results."

The most positive comment of all was from the Solano Mall administrator who said "The merchants join with me in saying 'come back next year.'"

Editor's note:

Copies of forms and memos for implementation of Public Schools Week mall displays are available from:

Faifield-Suisun Unified School District
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